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BOOK REVIEWS


Which futures are open for epistemology? Is there a conception of epistemological progress according to which epistemology makes progress? Can such a progress be characterized without a certain conception of knowledge, justification, or belief? That is, can we even make sense of epistemological progress without invoking the very concepts that epistemologists work so hard at characterizing?

In this stimulating volume, Stephen Hetherington has assembled a remarkable collection of twelve original essays (only one of them, by Paul Churchland, had been previously published, but it was revised for inclusion in the volume) plus an introduction, by Hetherington himself, which puts the essays in perspective. The papers address, in distinct ways, the issue of which approaches are promising in epistemology, and which developments should provide novel insights for epistemology's futures.

Several essays revisit established issues in epistemology, offering novel approaches to them. Other essays suggest a reorientation of some aspect of epistemology. And several do both.

Hilary Kornblith examines critically the role of intuition in epistemology, and argues that it is a mistake to focus on the analysis of our concepts of knowledge and justification, rather than on knowledge and justification themselves. While conceptual analysis via appeals to intuition provides the usual justificatory procedure in epistemology, Kornblith insists that this is neither the only nor the best approach to the subject. We should rather study knowledge and justification as natural phenomena. In fact, as is well known, on Kornblith's view, knowledge and justification are natural kinds. But, he argues, even if they turn out not to be epistemic kinds, but are only socially constructed ones, conceptual analysis via the use of intuition will not illuminate them. It is simply not the appropriate methodology for that.

Jonathan Weinberg also challenges the adequacy of an intuition-centred epistemology. But instead of the naturalistic approach favoured by Kornblith, Weinberg defends a neopragmatist conception. He offers several (tentative) desiderata to assess different methodologies in epistemology, and applies the desiderata to evaluate three different approaches: intuitionism (or the intuition-centred proposal), naturalism, and pragmatism. These approaches are then assessed in terms of seven desiderata: truth-conduciveness, normativity, dialectical robustness, progressivism without radicalism, interdisciplinary comportment, minimal naturalism, and plausible relativism.
or universalism. After arguing that both intuitionism and naturalism do not score very well, Weinberg maintains that neopragmatism (in the reconstructive form he offers) provides a better alternative. Crucial to his proposal is the consideration of imagined reconstructions of our epistemic norms: if we were to envisage a drastic reconstruction of these norms, what would we include, strengthen or abandon? Weinberg finishes the essay by examining how neopragmatism can be applied to the internalism/externalism debate about epistemic justification, and to the related issue of *a priori* justification.

One concern here, and Weinberg very likely will grant the point, is that the list of desiderata is somewhat controversial. It is unclear, for instance, why those who favour intuitionism should take the interdisciplinary comportment to offer even a relevant consideration, let alone a desideratum, to assess methodologies in epistemology.

Similarly to Kornblith and Weinberg, Paul Churchland also rejects the appeal to intuition as appropriate in epistemology. His focus is to elaborate on a new epistemology that emerges from cognitive neuroscience. But he rejects the Kantian idea that the unity of human cognition is the judgment. Rather, he insists, the unity of cognition is the activation pattern of a population of neurons, something that humans share with all other creatures that have a nervous system. The resulting view unifies cognition processes across a variety of creatures.

A different sort of departure from tradition is advanced by Stephen Hetherington. He revisits Ryle’s distinction between know-how and know-that. But as opposed to recent attempts to reduce know-how to know-that, he argues that the correct move is to reverse the order of reduction: know-that is a form of know-how. Ultimately, Hetherington argues, knowledge—including propositional knowledge—is an *ability*. To know that *p* is to know how to register accurately that *p*. In the end, epistemologists should not have granted to know-that the prominence it has received.

Christopher Hookway continues the critical reassessment of epistemology by arguing that the focus of epistemology should not be, as it is in the current doxastic paradigm, on the concepts of knowledge and justification. Rather, epistemology should examine our practice of epistemic evaluation, by studying how we manage to carry out inquiries and theoretical deliberations in a well-regulated way. Hookway then argues that the resulting form of pragmatism is able to explain the value of knowledge, the challenge of scepticism, and the issues involved in the internalism/externalism debate in a novel way.

Epistemology is arguably idealized. Adam Morton brings together epistemology and decision theory to explore some issues that a more realistic epistemology should address. Traditional epistemology examines changes of belief, given the information and reasoning available to a certain epistemic agent, but it ignores the agent’s desires and values. Clearly, a less idealized epistemology would also consider some of the agent’s values and desires. The question then becomes: if some of the agent’s beliefs change, how should she change the rest? A similar situation is found, Morton notes, in decision theory, which examines changes in desires given the agent’s
beliefs and intentions. The question then becomes: if some of the agent’s desires change, how should she change the rest? But in reality, Morton insists, we can hold neither beliefs nor desires constant: both change simultaneously. And with the acknowledgment of this issue, a first step is taken towards a more realistic epistemology. Morton then explores some of the intriguing complexities that the resulting picture generates.

But it is not only from decision theory that epistemology can benefit. Ethical theory also provides a significant source of insight. This is the central point of Linda Zagzebski’s essay. She defends exemplarism in ethics—the view that certain judgments of what we ought (or ought not) to do are more fundamental in our conception of the normative than any theory—and argues that exemplarism also has significant implications for epistemology. In particular, exemplarism offers a method to resolve the debate between foundationalists, coherentists and infinitists, as well as the dispute over contextualism and invariantism. Moreover, Zagzebski argues, exemplarism can also illuminate the problems of how rationality aligns with truth and of how to address irresolvable disagreements in belief. These are promising features for the resulting conception.

Richard Feldman also examines some of the intriguing epistemological puzzles raised by disagreement. After identifying some of the puzzles, he concludes that, more often than is suggested in current literature, the appropriate response is to suspend judgment. He thus arrives at a sceptical conclusion.

A number of other significant issues are discussed in the volume. William Lycan offers an insightful analysis of why the Gettier Problem has been so difficult for epistemology, and advances a solution to it. Catherine Elgin argues for a reorientation in epistemology so that there is room for making sense of science, by recommending a shift from the examination of knowledge to the investigation of (scientific) understanding. A. C. Grayling redescribes the problem of justification as the problem of epistemic finitude, and indicates how the latter is overcome in everyday practice; to explain this phenomenon, Grayling hypothesizes that a realistic framework that systematizes experience should be in place. Finally, Mark Kaplan examines the argument from illusion, and recommends that the way forward in epistemology is to return to J. L. Austin, and to articulate further his response to scepticism.

This is an extremely carefully thought-out and provocative book, and one that is a pleasure to read. Even the cover image was carefully selected: an exquisite drawing by Rembrandt, in which with just a few lines, the great master beautifully depicts two women teaching a child to walk. The women hold the child’s hands, and one of them points the way forward: the future ahead reached one step at a time. Something similar happens in epistemology. It is in this encounter of the old and the new, the classic and the innovative, that new steps and novel developments emerge. Judging by the content of this collection, the future seems bright for epistemology!

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